

# Syria Situation Report: September 14 - 27, 2017

**1 September 19 - 22: Israel Downs Alleged Hezbollah Drone Near Golan Heights:** The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle allegedly operated by Lebanese Hezbollah that entered airspace over the Golan Heights on September 19. The IDF later allegedly conducted a cross-border airstrike against an arms depot for Lebanese Hezbollah at the Damascus International Airport on September 22. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed that Israel will act to prevent the establishment of “permanent military bases” or weapons manufacturing facilities by Iran in Syria during his speech before the UN General Assembly on September 19.

**2 September 21: IS Fighters and Civilians Leave Eastern Hama Province for Idlib Province:**

Pro-regime forces brokered a deal to allow the evacuation of at least 1,500 fighters and civilians from the besieged IS-held pocket in Eastern Hama Province. The evacuees crossed regime-held terrain into areas held by Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) - the successor of Syrian Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah a-Sham - in Eastern Idlib Province.

**3 September 19: Joint AQ and Opposition Offensive in Northern Hama Province:**

Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham (HTS) and other opposition groups launched an offensive against pro-regime forces in Northern Hama Province on September 19. Opposition forces temporarily seized at least five villages before withdrawing amidst heavy pro-regime airstrikes. Russia and Syria later resumed their air campaign against civilian and opposition targets in Idlib and Aleppo Provinces. Russia conducted two sets of cruise missile strikes against targets in Idlib Province on September 22 and September 26.

**4 September 15: Astana Talks Result in Tentative Deal on 'De-Escalation Zone' in Idlib Province:**

Russia, Turkey, and Iran announced an initial deal on a new “de-escalation zone” in Idlib Province following the Astana VI Talks. Russian Special Envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev noted that negotiations remain ongoing but that the deal will likely involve a monitoring force consisting of five hundred soldiers each from Russia, Iran, and Turkey overseen by a Joint Coordination Center.

**5 September 22 - 26: Kurdish-Led Autonomous Region Holds Local Elections in Northern Syria:**

The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) - the *de facto* autonomous region run by the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) - held its first elections for local “communes” as part of a three-phase plan to establish a new decentralized government in Northern Syria. The rival Kurdish National Coalition (KNC) boycotted the vote. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem later stated the regime would be “open to negotiations” on a “form of autonomy” for Syrian Kurds after the defeat of IS in Syria.

**6 September 23 - 25: SDF Continues Political Consolidation in Deir e-Zor Province:** The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced the formation of the Deir e-Zor Civilian Council (DCC) in Jazrah in Northern Deir e-Zor Province. The DCC intends to eventually relocate to Deir e-Zor City. Syrian Interim Government (SIG)-affiliated Deir ez-Zour Local Council condemned the DCC as an “illegitimate” organization that does not reflect the will of local residents and will fuel extremism in Deir e-Zor Province.

**7 September 16 - 21: Russia Conducts Strikes Targeting SDF Near Deir e-Zor City:**

Russia conducted airstrikes targeting positions held by the SDF near Deir e-Zor City on September 16. The strike occurred one day after the SDF-affiliated Deir e-Zor Military Council asserted that its fighters would resist efforts by pro-regime forces to cross the Euphrates River. Russia and Syria also reportedly conducted a new set of airstrikes and artillery shelling targeting the SDF on September 25 after the SDF seized the critical Conoco Gas Plant near Deir e-Zor City on September 23. Russia denied its involvement in either incident.

**8 September 18 - 24: Pro-Regime Forces Continue Advances in Deir e-Zor Province:**

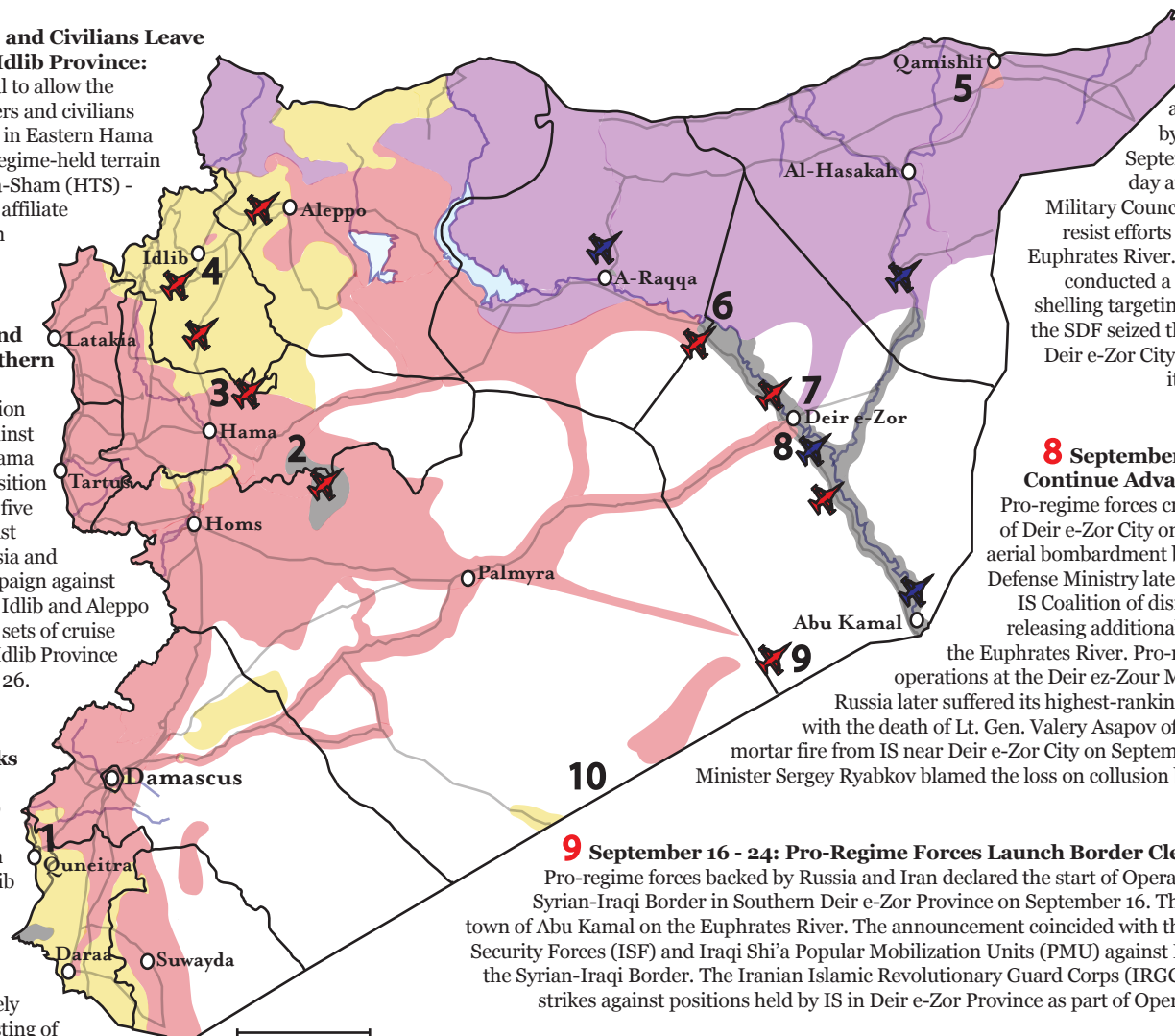
Pro-regime forces crossed the Euphrates River south of Deir e-Zor City on September 18 following a heavy aerial bombardment by Syria and Russia. The Russian Defense Ministry later accused the SDF and U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition of disrupting cross-river operations by releasing additional water from the Tabqa Dam into the Euphrates River. Pro-regime forces also resumed flight operations at the Deir ez-Zour Military Airport on September 18. Russia later suffered its highest-ranking confirmed combat loss in Syria with the death of Lt. Gen. Valery Asapov of the Fifth Storming Corps due to mortar fire from IS near Deir e-Zor City on September 24. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov blamed the loss on collusion between the U.S. and IS in Syria.

**9 September 16 - 24: Pro-Regime Forces Launch Border Clearing Operations with Iraq:**

Pro-regime forces backed by Russia and Iran declared the start of Operation ‘Fajr III’ to clear IS from the Syrian-Iraqi Border in Southern Deir e-Zor Province on September 16. The offensive aims to reach the key town of Abu Kamal on the Euphrates River. The announcement coincided with the start of operations by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Iraqi Shi'a Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) against IS in Western Anbar Province on the Syrian-Iraqi Border. The Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) later claimed to conduct drone strikes against positions held by IS in Deir e-Zor Province as part of Operation ‘Fajr III’ on September 24.

**10 September 18: U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition Withdraws from Outpost on Syrian-Iraqi Border:**

The U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition and the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated Maghawir a-Thawra - a vetted opposition group backed by the U.S. and Jordan - withdrew from the Zakaf Outpost near A-Tanf in Eastern Homs Province near the Syrian-Iraqi Border. The withdrawal is part of an alleged de-confliction agreement between the U.S. and Russia in Eastern Syria. Maghawir a-Thawra stated that its fighters “destroyed” the outpost before the withdrawal. The U.S. Anti-ISIS Coalition still retains its training base at A-Tanf.



## Areas of Control\*

- Pro-Regime Forces
- Opposition Forces
- The Islamic State
- Kurdish Forces
- Hay'at Tahrir a-Sham  
\*Formerly Jabhat a-Nusra

## Airstrikes

- Pro-Regime
- U.S. / Coalition



\*THIS MAP DOES NOT DEPICT AL QAEDA CONTROL IN WESTERN SYRIA. ISW IS DEVELOPING A NEW CONTROL OF TERRAIN MAP THAT WILL ASSESS THE FULL EXTENT OF AL QAEDA PRESENCE IN SYRIA.

\*Control of Terrain Accurate as of 14 SEP 2017